

Ashley Scenic River Advisory Council

A landowner partnership for River Stewardship

What is the Ashley River and why is it important?

The Wassamassaw and Cypress swamps form the headwater of the first 30 miles of the Ashley River's 215,000 acre watershed. The next 30 miles of channel open up to the Charleston Peninsula, giving way to the Atlantic Ocean. This winding, Coastal Plain River extends from fresh to saltwater, the divide constantly shifting with the tide. The riverbed winds through cypress knees, red maples, and blackwater tupelo trees in Dorchester County; it floats East past red-winged blackbirds feeding off wild rice in the fall; and ends in an expansive green monochromatic carpet of smooth cordgrass. This historic river observes many preserved plantations, including Magnolia Home & Gardens, Middleton Place, and Drayton Hall. Colonial Fort Dorchester survives as a seventeenth century treasure of a bustling trading town on the Ashley River. In sum, the Ashley River's historical, cultural, and natural resources are plenty and significant.

Who is the Ashley Scenic River Advisory Council?



Water recreation is a driving force of the Charleston economy.

A 22 mile segment of the Ashley River was designated as State Scenic River in 1998; it extends from Highway 17-A at Sland's Bridge near the Town of Summerville to the crossing of Interstate I-526, the Mark Clark Expressway. The Ashley Scenic River Advisory Council was established under the South Carolina Scenic Rivers Act to assist and advise in the protection and management of the Ashley Scenic River, a state Geographic Area of Concern. Council membership includes river-bordering landowners, river users, and local community members; their views represent community desires relating to conservation of the Ashley Scenic River and contributing areas. Council relies on a guiding document, the Ashley Scenic River Management Plan, which was developed over a two-year community input process.

River Triumphs

Over the past 10 years, the Ashley River Advisory Council has witnessed some victories for the River.

- ♦ Ashley River Historic District regulations by the City of North Charleston
- ♦ MeadWestvaco's planning efforts for the adjacent East Edisto land and reacquisition of the Watson-Hill tract
- ♦ Conservation-minded developments that include The Ponds and Poplar Grove
- ♦ Numerous individually-initiated property protection measures, such as deed restrictions and easements
- ♦ Dorchester County's comprehensive density and buffer land use planning effort to create the Ashley River Historic Overlay District.



Spider lilies along the Ashley.

Photo courtesy of Charleston Post & Courier, 2009.

Ashley Scenic River Region

What are the threats?

Growth Patterns—Historical growth trends in the Ashley River region show a 250% change in land use and a 40% increase in population during the time period of mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. These numbers provide something called a “sprawl ratio” of 6:1, and indicate that land use is far exceeding population growth. Researchers also forecast 800,000 new residents to the tri-county area in the next 30 years. If previous development patterns are continued, the area’s developed land will consume over 800 square miles by 2030.

Stormwater—Stormwater carries sediment and pollutants across impervious surfaces (rooftops and pavements) and directly into the rivers. The impacts of impervious surface are exponential: a one-acre parking lot produces 16 times the volume of runoff that comes from a one-acre meadow. Additionally, most oils, metals, pesticides and other pollutants on the ground are picked up by rains within the first five minutes. Without adequate vegetated buffers, these materials are dumped directly into the waterway. Waters within impervious watersheds are less diverse, less stable, and less productive than those in natural watersheds.

Impervious surfaces—Research has shown that a watershed covered with more than fifteen percent impervious surfaces will be ecologically compromised to the point where habitat quality falls below the level necessary to sustain a broad diversity of aquatic life. Studies specifically focusing on coastal estuaries have confirmed that general degradation begins at the ten-percent threshold.

What is Council’s Request?



Council members are concerned about the cumulative impacts of the growth patterns, stormwater, and impervious surfaces on the Ashley River with regard to water quality, fish and wildlife, and recreation.

We urge planners, regulators, and land use managers to consider these cumulative impacts and suggest best management practices when considering a road or development project. We also urge landowners and citizens to take conservation measures to protect the waterway such as picking up after your pet, installing buffers along riverfront property, going native, and becoming involved in conservation.

*Council Member Howard Bridgeman paddles the Ashley.
Photo courtesy of Charleston Post & Courier, 2009.*



Life's Better Outdoors!



Our Council’s meetings are open to the public, typically on every third Wednesday of the month, from 3 to 5 pm at the Dorchester Road Library. For more information:

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